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Ex-Clerk Pleads Guilty To Leaking Data in Ghana

U.S. Drops 15 Counts Against Former CIA Employee

By Caryle Murphy
Washington Post Staff Writer

A former employee of the CIA in Ghana, who admitted last month that she disclosed the identities of two CIA covert agents to her former Ghanaian boyfriend, pleaded guilty yesterday to one charge of revealing classified information. The government dismissed 15 other charges against her, including more serious ones of espionage.

Sharon M. Scranage, 29, answered questions from U.S. District Judge Richard L. Williams in a clear, strong voice, but dabbed her eyes with a tissue as she entered her plea during a 22-minute hearing in Alexandria, which was attended by her parents and other family members.

"I always believed [the government] would come to its senses," Scranage's attorney, Brian Gettings, said yesterday. The agreement "was what we were willing to do even before the indictment," he said.

Scranage, who worked for the CIA in Ghana as a clerk from May 1983 to May 1985, pleaded guilty Aug. 12 to two violations of a law prohibiting disclosure of the identities of persons working for the CIA.

A native of Virginia's rural Northern Neck, Scranage faces a maximum penalty of 30 years in prison and \$110,000 in fines at her sentencing Oct. 25 for all three violations.

She was to go to trial on Oct. 7 on the remaining charges of espionage, conspiracy to commit espionage, releasing classified information and conspiracy to release classified information.

"One thing we would never do was admit to espionage or conspiracy, because she didn't do it," Gettings said. He said he believed the government assented to the plea agreement because CIA documents it received Monday in preparation for her trial "totally corroborated her account of what happened."

"I think the government concluded that this was not espionage; the girl was put upon by [her former boyfriend] and literally all the stuff was dragged out of her in the most extreme circumstances," Gettings said.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Justin Williams declined to comment on why the government accepted the plea agreement.



BY JOHN McDONNELL—THE WASHINGTON POST

Sharon Scranage arrives at Alexandria court.

At a July 19 bond hearing for Scranage's ex-boyfriend, Michael Agbotui Soussoudis, an FBI agent testified that Scranage had told him that Soussoudis at times was armed with a 9 mm automatic pistol and had "implied that people at the [U.S.] embassy [in Ghana] and their families could be hurt" and that "a CIA employee could be shot" if she did not cooperate with him.

It was not immediately clear how yesterday's events would affect the upcoming trial on Oct. 15 of Soussoudis on charges of espionage, conspiracy to commit espionage, receiving classified information and conspiracy to receive classified information.

His lawyers will argue for dismissal of the charges against him in pretrial motions on Oct. 4 on the grounds that U.S. law cannot

be applied to a foreign national who gathers information in his own country at the direction of his own government, which is acting in its perceived national interests, according to court papers.

Soussoudis, 39, who is a first cousin to Ghana's leader, Flight Lt. Jerry Rawlings, was arrested by the FBI July 10 at the Springfield Holiday Inn, where he was planning to meet Scranage. By that time, Scranage had disclosed her activities to CIA security personnel and FBI agents.

Government prosecutors have alleged Soussoudis was working for Ghana's intelligence service, but Ghana's ambassador to the United States has denied that allegation.

Scranage yesterday pleaded guilty to communicating to Soussoudis, "whom she had reason to believe was

an agent for Ghana and whom she had previously realized was gathering intelligence information," information classified "secret" concerning "military equipment which Ghana had requested from Libya," according to the plea agreement.

Scranage, whose job as an operations-support assistant at the CIA office in Accra, Ghana, included the task of filing CIA documents, copied down in shorthand information from classified cables, prosecutor Williams told the court. She then transcribed the notes into longhand and gave them to Soussoudis, Williams said.

Scranage had a "top secret" security clearance at the time and her actions "were not done by accident, mistake or other innocent reason," he told the court.

Under yesterday's plea agreement, Scranage has agreed to appear as a government witness at Soussoudis' trial.